

Teacher Education and the Purposes of History

To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be that have tried it.

—Herman Melville¹

The two of us spend much of our professional time preparing history and social studies teachers. We have taught thousands of students in our methods courses, along with hundreds more in workshops or graduate classes. We know this includes a great many success stories—teachers who provide exciting instruction for their students in ways consistent with what we have taught them. Others have adopted our suggestions less wholeheartedly but with selective enthusiasm for practices we consider important—good literature, or inquiry, or conflicting viewpoints, or open-ended writing. Yet we fear these success stories may pale in comparison with the number of teachers who have ignored our ideas completely. As we look around, we have to admit that many classrooms (the majority? the vast majority?) show little evidence of the curricular and instructional perspectives we have tried to promote. Around the country, we have hundreds of colleagues who prepare teachers much as we do (many with greater ability and enthusiasm, no doubt), yet we fear their experiences may be the same as ours—plenty of individual success stories but no widespread or systematic changes in teaching.

Why is this? How can our efforts at developing teachers' understanding of instructional methods leave so little imprint on classroom practice? Why aren't all children using a variety of sources to develop interpretations of history? Surely teachers who have taken courses from us or our colleagues know that history is an interpretive, inquiry-oriented subject involving multiple perspectives, and they must know how to implement the practice in the classroom, at least in an introductory way. Yet maybe knowing isn't enough. From a sociocultural perspective, after all, what people know—conceived of as individual cognition—is less important than how they act purposefully (and how they use cultural tools to do so). To understand why teachers engage in the practices they do, perhaps we need to turn to the socially situated purposes that guide their actions. While we are at it,

maybe we should ask ourselves, as teacher educators, whether we are helping them explore themes "mighty" enough to lead to the kinds of instruction we hope for.

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION REFORM

Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle note that over the last two decades, teacher learning has been at the forefront of efforts at improving education and that "it has been more or less assumed that teachers who *know* more teach better." This has not always been so: Perspectives on the teacher's role in improving instruction have undergone a number of changes over the past half century. Behaviorists of the 1950s, for example, emphasized the transformative potential of teaching machines and programmed instruction; from their viewpoint, the teacher was little more than a manager of the classroom who needed little specialized knowledge. Similarly, in the 1960s, a variety of national organizations created and field tested new reading materials, artifact kits, and classroom activities that focused on the concepts and procedures of the academic disciplines. Although rarely dismissing teacher knowledge directly, these movements clearly hoped to promote instructional reform by improving curricular materials rather than by addressing teachers' ideas; teachers were responsible primarily for implementing the innovations developed by others. By the mid-1970s, reform efforts (and much academic research) focused less on curricular innovation and more on "teaching behaviors"—the set of generic skills that were believed to result in higher levels of student achievement (such as pacing, wait time, feedback, and so on). Although this approach put teachers at the center of instructional improvement, it deemphasized their role as knowledgeable professionals and centered instead on changing observable behavior through structured systems of feedback.¹

Over the last 20 years, though, most theory and research on teachers' education and professional development has focused on precisely the area neglected in previous work—their active role in designing and implementing instruction. This work has been grounded in the assumption that teachers are ultimately responsible for what goes in their classrooms; they serve as "brokers" or "gatekeepers" who select from and transform the array of possible curricula, resources, and instructional strategies to provide concrete learning activities for students. As Stephen Thornton puts it, "As gatekeepers, teachers make the day-to-day decisions concerning both the subject matter and the experiences to which students have access and the nature of that subject matter and those experiences." If teachers' decisions shape their students' curricular and instructional experiences, then it seems logical to assume that we need to understand the thinking behind those decisions, and a large body of research has been devoted to this topic. Although this research has employed a number of different theoretical frameworks

and conceptual terms—including personal theories, practical knowledge, interactive decision making, *frames* of reference, pedagogical reasoning, and others—all have shared a concern with getting "inside teachers' heads" to explain how they make the decisions that determine classroom practice.³

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding what teachers know and believe (the distinction between the two is elusive) has been that of Lee Shulman. Shulman argues that a critical component of teachers' expertise is their pedagogical content knowledge. Whereas some reformers insist that teachers need greater content preparation in their subject (usually conceived of as more coursework in a specific academic discipline), and others argue for greater exposure to educational theories and methods, Shulman maintains that the distinctive body of knowledge for teaching lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy. Teachers must understand the structures and principles of their disciplines, and they must also know how to transform disciplinary ideas in ways that will make sense to students. Much of the recent research on the thought and practice of history teachers has been consistent with this conception of teacher's thinking, particularly in its emphasis on teachers' understanding of the underlying conceptual structures of the history and their implications for classroom practice. As Bruce VanSledright succinctly notes, most research in the field has assumed that "history teachers need to possess deep knowledge of their discipline and robust understandings of how to teach it." From this viewpoint, if teachers know that history involves the interpretation of evidence among members of a community of inquiry, and if they learn to apply that knowledge in the classroom, then presumably they will engage students in inquiry-based historical interpretation. Indeed, the two of us have written an entire book based precisely on that assumption: *In Doing History: Investigating With Children in Elementary and Middle Schools*, we set out to help teachers understand history as an interpretive and inquiry-oriented endeavor, and we described classroom practices consistent with that ideal. However, the question remains: Is it true? Does this knowledge and understanding affect classroom practice?⁴

THE PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORY TEACHERS

Several studies have investigated the extent to which teachers' understanding of the interpretive nature of history is consistent with that of historians, and each of these studies has found that teachers typically have little acquaintance with such disciplinary concerns as the context, authorship, and perspective of historical documents. Chara Bohan and O. L. Davis, Jr., for example, gave three secondary student teachers a set of primary source accounts of the bombing of Hiroshima; they asked teachers to read the documents, think aloud as they did so, and use the documents to write a narrative account of the event. On the basis of responses to this task, Bohan

and Davis concluded that all three were unfamiliar with the process of creating historical interpretations: Participants failed to consider the source of the documents, they saw each as a simple statement of fact, and they failed to cite sources in writing their accounts. In a related study, Melanie Gillaspie and Davis gave a similar task to three elementary student teachers. They found that only one of the three compared the source accounts to each other or referred to them in the written narrative; one participant made no reference to the sources at all, and the third failed to explain the accounts in detail or to question their perspectives.⁵

Elizabeth Yeager and Davis also found varied levels of disciplinary understanding among both elementary and secondary teachers. They asked three secondary and three elementary student teachers to read and compare conflicting accounts of the battle at Lexington Green, just as Sam Wineburg had done with historians and high school students in an earlier study. Only one of the secondary participants noted previous experience with issues of historical interpretation (he considered history his hobby), and he read the documents much as the historians in Wineburg's study had done—he looked for the authors' assumptions, compared the audiences to which the documents were addressed, and considered the contexts and circumstances of their production. Another secondary participant more closely resembled Wineburg's high school students: He simply gathered and summarized information from the documents and saw little subtext. The third was just beginning to see problems of bias as she worked through the exercise; although she merely summarized the documents initially, she eventually began to compare them and to speculate about their authorship and potential bias. Although the three elementary teachers had more limited backgrounds in academic history, they demonstrated patterns of historical understanding nearly identical to those of the secondary teachers: One summarized the documents with little comparison or attention to context or subtext; one explored the authors' assumptions, purposes, and audiences; and a third began by summarizing but developed a more critical and interpretive perspective as she worked through the set of documents.⁶

When Yeager and Davis gave the same task to 15 practicing secondary teachers, they found three distinct profiles among participants. Some read the documents for evidence of each author's purpose and perspective; some were concerned primarily with determining on which "side" each document fell and hoped to be able to uncover accurate information about "what actually happened"; and still others, again like the high school students in Wineburg's study, simply gathered information with little attention to comparison or subtext. One of the teachers in this third category even equated credibility with interest and readability—she considered a passage from Howard Fast's *April Morning* more credible than other sources "because it was the 'most fun.... It has vivid details, and it's full of emotion.'"

Although these studies do not indicate that teachers have a uniformly impoverished understanding of history (and the small sample sizes limit generalizability), they do suggest that attending to teachers' disciplinary understanding may be a critical task for teacher educators, as implied in the perspective of Shulman and others. If teachers do not understand the nature of historical knowledge, then they cannot design meaningful learning experiences for students, because they will not know what it is that students need to learn (much less how to help them learn it). A teacher who thinks sources can be evaluated on how "fun" they are surely is not qualified to teach history, and as teacher educators (whether in history departments or colleges of education), we must help our students develop more sophisticated and accurate understandings of what history is all about. A "deep knowledge of their discipline" would seem to be a prerequisite for history teachers, and its development a major task for those of us who educate them. Encouragingly, though, the study of student teachers by Yeager and Davis suggests this task may not be as difficult as it seems: Two of their six participants developed more sophisticated understandings of historical evidence and interpretation simply through participating in one research exercise! Perhaps extended exposure to historical content is less important to the growth of pedagogical content knowledge than intensive engagement in a few well-chosen tasks that allow teachers to reflect on the epistemological basis of historical knowledge.

PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Although the studies described in the previous section suggest teachers need greater understanding of the interpretive nature of history, there is some reason to question whether sophisticated disciplinary understanding, even when combined with pedagogical knowledge, will have an impact on instruction. Bruce VanSledright, for example, conducted a case study of an experienced secondary history teacher (a 16-year veteran of the classroom) who had just completed a doctorate in history. In her graduate studies—and particularly in her dissertation research—she had come to understand the complicated nature of historical facts and evidence, and she recognized the central role of interpretation in the creation of historical knowledge. In addition, this teacher's apprenticeship into the historical profession centered on "the new sociocultural history," or "history from the bottom up," a perspective that reflects one of the discipline's central concerns in recent decades. Although one might question whether her understanding of the discipline was as thorough as that of someone immersed in the profession for a longer period of time, her level of disciplinary content knowledge was certainly all that could be asked for in a teacher (few are going to complete a doctorate in history, after all), and her extensive classroom experience sug-

gests that she should have had no problem putting her sophisticated knowledge into practice in the classroom.⁸

In fact, her teaching reflected little of this disciplinary understanding, and her students had few opportunities to engage with historical knowledge as she had done. Her instruction focused primarily on enabling students to reproduce a single, consensus-oriented account of the U.S. past, one that was outlined in the district curriculum and assessed, primarily through multiple-choice items, on a required district test at the end of the year. Students spent much of their time learning the content of long review lists that centered on factual information about people, places, and events. Although she addressed multiple perspectives in the past, and although she reminded students of the difference between fact and interpretation (frequently beginning sentences with phrases such as, "Some historians believe ..."), she nonetheless treated the textbook as though it were an authoritative and unproblematic source of factual information. Students did not learn that the text itself was an interpretation, nor were they asked to evaluate the historical claims found in that or any other source. There were no questions about where the evidence for historical accounts came from, and there was little work with primary sources. Even the teacher's concern with history from the bottom up was limited to a single day spent lecturing about women and minorities during the Federal Period. Students' exposure to the teachers' "fact/interpretation" distinction, then, was spent primarily on the factual side of the dichotomy. VanSledright concludes that "by itself, the possession of deep *and* current subject-matter knowledge arrayed with rich pedagogical experience provides no promise of an unproblematic translation to the high school classroom."⁹

VanSledright's study is not alone in questioning the connection between disciplinary knowledge and classroom practice. G. Williamson McDiarmid interviewed 14 students (8 of whom planned to teach high school history) enrolled in an undergraduate historiography course. At the beginning of the course, students recognized that bias in historical accounts existed, but they thought such bias was simply the result of the personal beliefs or agendas of authors and that all historical texts were equally unreliable. After taking the course, about half the students had developed more complex notions of the interpretive nature of history—recognizing, for example, that historical knowledge is always tentative and that history is invariably seen through the preoccupations of the present. However, although students' disciplinary knowledge increased, their beliefs about teaching and learning history remained unchanged: They thought that lecture was the most appropriate method for teaching history and that a good history teacher was one who told "good stories" and wrote lecture notes on the board. They did not think that high school students would be motivated to engage in the kind of interpretive work they had done in their historiography class or be capable of doing so; they thought learners simply needed to be told what happened and why.¹⁰

The research by VanSledright and by McDiarmid points to the lack of a straightforward connection between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogy, but still more shocking is a pattern consistently found in research on history and social studies education: Even teachers' conceptions of pedagogy have little connection to their teaching. In study after study, teachers articulate a view of instruction that emphasizes active student learning, multiple viewpoints, and construction of knowledge. However, a different picture emerges when they are observed teaching or when they describe their classroom practices. What teachers actually do is cover the content of textbooks or curriculum guides through teacher-directed instruction and careful control of classroom activity and discourse. Even when teachers' ideas about the subject differ from each other, or when they have vastly different levels of background or expertise, they wind up teaching in remarkably similar ways, and these often have little connection to their espoused beliefs."¹¹

Stephanie van Hover and Elizabeth Yeager, for example, conducted a case study of a 2nd-year, high school history teacher who had graduated from an intensive certification program emphasizing historical interpretation, inquiry, and the use of a variety of historical sources and perspectives. This teacher was considered one of the program's strongest students, and she also held an undergraduate degree in history. In interviews, she demonstrated a clear understanding of historical thinking and inquiry: She saw history as an interpretive discipline that involved contextualization of actions and motivations, believed that history should be analyzed from multiple perspectives, and thought the subject should be taught through inquiry exercises, problem-solving activities, debate, discussion, and cooperative learning.¹²

In all respects, this teacher's pedagogical content knowledge seemed exemplary. Her instruction, however, bore almost no resemblance to that knowledge. She did not encourage perspective-taking, interpretation, or open-ended historical thinking or inquiry. Instead, classroom activities were heavily teacher centered. She lectured frequently—recounting a single, univocal narrative of major events in U.S. history—and students took notes from the outline of textbook chapters. When she included simulations or other group activities, she told students what conclusions they should draw, and she contradicted those who disagreed with her. Although she credited her social studies methods course with influencing her knowledge of how to teach history, she applied almost none of what she learned in that course to actual practice.¹³

As teacher educators, our commonsense explanation for this failure to influence instructional practices is to point to our own limited impact on prospective teachers. We have only a brief time to help them develop the pedagogical content knowledge they will need, typically during a social studies methods course, supplemented by other education courses that may also be relevant to instructional practices in history. (At the secondary level, teachers may also take one or more courses in historical meth-

ods as part of a history major or area of concentration; other history courses may also address the interpretive nature of history, although not usually methods for teaching it at the precollegiate level.) This brief set of experiences seems too thin to overcome the "apprenticeship of observation"—the 12 or more years students have spent watching teachers perform their daily tasks, a time during which they have developed an image of teaching that revolves around teacher control and the coverage of textbook-based information. The content of students' university courses, particularly in education, seems to have little effect on their ideas about teaching, particularly when the practices they observe in field settings contradict that content. Within history and social studies education, the view that university courses have a limited impact on teachers is supported by numerous studies showing that their ideas about education derive from a wide variety of sources, including not only their own experiences as students but their personalities, experiences with pupils, institutional factors, and the perspectives of family members, colleagues, and cooperating teachers.¹⁴

This can be a fairly pessimistic viewpoint, because it implies that what we do in teacher education programs has little impact on the development of teachers. When this perspective does not descend into despair, its implication seems to be that we need to redouble our efforts to develop students' pedagogical content knowledge: We have to design better history courses, with a greater emphasis on the nature of the discipline, we have to do a better job challenging students' ideas in our methods courses and helping them construct new understandings of how to teach, and we have to select field placements carefully so that students see good models of the kinds of instruction we hope to promote. Only such thorough and intensive efforts seem to provide hope of developing a clear and consistent body of pedagogical content knowledge in our students.

However, we believe this approach may be misguided, or at least insufficient. As the studies by VanSledright, McDiarmid, and van Hover and Yeager show, understanding the interpretive nature of history has little impact on teachers' instructional ideas or practices. Moreover, as we noted previously, studies consistently show that teachers who have learned a variety of pedagogical practices still fail to implement them in the classroom. There simply does not seem to be any evidence that teacher knowledge is the variable that predicts classroom practice. That is not to say such knowledge is unimportant; recognizing history's interpretive nature and knowing how to represent the subject to students is undoubtedly a necessary condition for teaching history interpretively. If teachers do not understand the underlying premises of the subject, and if they do not know how to go about implementing inquiry, or discussing historical controversies, or locating primary sources, then it is inconceivable that they will actually do so. However, this knowledge, by itself, does not appear to be a sufficient condition for transforming educational practices in history. Teachers can under-

stand history as a discipline and know how to teach it in the ways recommended by reformers and still not do so.

THE PRACTICE OF HISTORY TEACHING

The emphasis on pedagogical content knowledge — whether conceptualized in Shulman's terms or through alternative frameworks such as personal theories, practical knowledge, or pedagogical reasoning — may be an unproductive way of thinking about instructional practice, because it assumes that teachers' behavior is primarily the result of individual cognition. From a sociocultural perspective, attention should be directed not just toward the private ideas teachers are believed to "possess" as individuals but toward the actions they engage in as members of social groups, as well as the socially situated purposes that guide those actions. Pamela Grossman, Peter Smagorinsky, and Sheila Valencia, for example, have argued that the individualistic focus of research on teaching should give way to a concern with the "predominant value systems and social practices that characterize the settings in which learning to teach occurs." These values and practices provide direction for beginners who hope to become part of the system of schooling, and they necessarily constrain the choices available to them. From this perspective, learning to teach is not a matter of applying individually constructed knowledge — whether developed in university coursework or through a lifetime of experiences — but a process of appropriating the historically and culturally situated tools and practices of school settings.¹⁵ To this point in the book, we have emphasized how the historical actions demanded of students are situated in broader contexts; we now turn to cultural expectations for teachers' actions.

What are the predominant social practices in classrooms? The empirical evidence on this question, particularly in the fields of history and social studies, is clear: Teachers are expected to (a) cover the curriculum and (b) maintain control. In explaining the nature of their classroom practices, teachers repeatedly return to the centrality of these two activities. The need to cover a prescribed curriculum is the most common way of explaining instruction, both in published research and our own experience: A curriculum exists (whether in textbooks, district curriculum guides, or state standards), and the teacher's primary job is to ensure that students are exposed to that curriculum — principals expect it, parents support it, and teachers themselves accept coverage as their chief duty. Improving students' comprehension, developing their motivation, and enhancing their ability to work together may be important, but as instructional activities, they are distinctly secondary to delivering a prescribed curriculum (even though teachers may be mistaken about the actual content of that curriculum). If teachers perceive that primary sources, multiple perspectives, or student interpretation will interfere with that goal, coverage will win out, because covering the curriculum is what teachers do.¹⁶

Equally important is maintaining classroom control. Again, both research evidence and our own experience suggest that most teachers devote a great deal of effort to making sure that classroom procedures are orderly, students are quiet and still, and instructional objectives, materials, and practices are consistent and predictable. Teachers are particularly concerned about other teachers' (and administrators') perceptions of their ability to maintain control; nothing is more likely to inspire condescension from colleagues or a negative evaluation from a principal or mentor than a classroom in which students talk too much, move around too often, or pursue unstructured activities. Teachers know that the open-ended, group projects associated with historical inquiry lead to precisely those behaviors associated with a "lack of control." In Bruce Fehn's and Kim Koeppen's study of preservice teachers who had engaged in an intensive, document-based social studies methods course, for example, they found that students said they were likely to increase their use of primary sources only if they had been shown how to do it in a highly structured way, to overcome classroom control problems.¹⁷

This focus on coverage and control is especially clear in Linda McNeil's influential book, *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge*. In her study of social studies teachers at four high schools, McNeil found that despite differences in their political and philosophical views, teachers' classroom actions were remarkably similar. Although many of them professed high academic expectations for students and were themselves very knowledgeable about history, political events, and economics, their teaching reflected little of this. Instead, as they recognized, their actions revolved around controlling the method of presentation while covering the content of their courses. McNeil identifies four strategies teachers used to accomplish this goal: *fragmentation*, in which topics were presented as disjointed pieces of information; *mystification*, in which teachers made topics seem important yet unknowable, thus closing down discussion; *omission*, in which teachers left out consideration of political and economic issues that were either contemporary or controversial; and *defensive simplification*, in which complex topics were accorded only superficial attention. By using these strategies, teachers were able to cover the curriculum efficiently and limit the opportunities for potentially disruptive student discussion.¹⁸

McNeil's findings are consistent with much of the research on classroom practice in history and social studies. Seen from a sociocultural vantage point, the principal social acts of history teaching are coverage and control. The tools teachers use include the four approaches identified by McNeil, along with other strategies, such as limiting information to a single source (such as the textbook), requiring all students to learn the same body of information, and testing students on their restatement of predetermined facts and analysis. The purpose of coverage and control, though, is somewhat murkier. When asked for their ideas about the purpose of history edu-

cation, teachers typically respond with abstract rationales that have little connection to their practices. We are less concerned with teachers' explanations than with the purposes that actually guide their practices of coverage and control. Why are they so concerned with these?

THE ROLE OF PURPOSE IN HISTORY TEACHING

Identifying the purposes that guide teachers' actions necessarily involves an element of speculation. People cannot always be counted on to give valid explanations of their actions, and it would be offensive even to ask a question like, "Why do you spend all your time controlling students?" Yet two possibilities immediately suggest themselves, and both have found support in the literature on teacher education. The first is that teachers hope to fit in: They want to be accepted as competent professionals by fellow teachers, administrators, and parents. Doing so means acting in ways similar to those around them; if everyone else covers the curriculum and maintains quiet, orderly classrooms, devoid of controversy, then new teachers will be highly motivated to do the same, regardless of what they may have learned about the nature of history or methods of teaching the subject. Out of all the potential teaching practices they have encountered—through their own experience, in readings, in teacher education courses, and elsewhere—they will understandably choose those that allow them to achieve the goal of acceptance.¹⁹

A second purpose guiding teachers' actions is practicality: Content coverage is an "efficient" practice, one unlikely to require unreasonable expenditures of time and energy. Teaching is hard enough without placing unreasonable demands on oneself, particularly if the additional work may not lead to meaningful results, and teachers take these energy demands into account as they develop classroom practices.²⁰ Notions of efficiency and practicality are relative, though, because schools differ dramatically in prevailing norms regarding appropriate expenditure of effort; in many schools, teachers continue to work in their classrooms until well after dark, and in others, the parking lot is empty 15 minutes after school is dismissed. As teachers make decisions about how to expend their energy, then, they look to those around them for cues about what constitutes reasonable and unreasonable work.

When teachers aim for group acceptance and practicality, practices like coverage and control make perfect sense. If a teacher's purpose is to fit in, then at most schools it would be nonsense to engage students in developing their own interpretations of controversial historical issues. Similarly, if a teacher hopes to make it through the day (or the year) without potentially wasted effort, there is little point in developing group projects based on original research; these require an incredible amount of work by the teacher, and they may result in learning that has little connection to the required curriculum. Whether teachers have the pedagogical content knowl-

edge to carry out such practices is irrelevant if these endeavors do not help them achieve their goals.

Again, this kind of explanation for teachers' actions seems fatalistic, because it suggests that what we do as teacher educators has little influence on classroom practice. We can help teachers construct an understanding of history as an interpretive subject, but they may never apply that perspective, because it fails to contribute to their goal of fitting in. We can help them discover tools for engaging students in interpreting primary sources, but these will never be used if interpretation does not occur in the first place. However, this recognition—that factors beyond pedagogical content knowledge influence classroom actions—is not tantamount to consigning teachers to history's dustbin, nor does it doom teacher educators to irrelevance. Studies consistently have shown that some teachers do apply what they have learned about historical evidence and interpretation. There are thousands of such teachers around the country, and they do far more than cover the curriculum or control students. We have seen them teach, we have written about them, we have read their books and articles. Why are they so different? Because their purposes are different.

At the most basic level, this means that some teachers are not interested in conformity. Many of the best history and social studies teachers we know are unconcerned with the opinions of people at their school, particularly those of other teachers. They go about their jobs in the best way they know how and pay no attention to whether their colleagues snub their noses at them for having classrooms that are loud and messy, or students who move around on their own initiative. In fact, some of these teachers pride themselves on their nonconformity and actively challenge school norms. Other good teachers, meanwhile, seem to have little interest in practicality: They take on multiple projects, track down a mountain of resources, provide detailed feedback on every piece of student work, and win "Teacher of the Year" honors. They give the impression that efficiency is unimportant to them because they have a limitless supply of time and energy. For mavericks and dynamos like these, coverage and control have little relevance, and they are free to pursue other activities with their students.

However, as inspiring as such teachers may be, they provide only a limited model for others. First, most teachers are not mavericks, and no amount of exhortation is likely to convince them to become such; even fewer have unlimited energy, and teacher education programs can do little to change their students' metabolisms. More important, though, it is not enough that some teachers do not share the purposes that lead many of their colleagues to emphasize coverage and control, for this says nothing about what their purposes are or what practices they will adopt themselves. Without a sense of purpose that is clearly thought out and articulated, teachers may fall prey to each new fad or harebrained instructional program, or they may find themselves adopting the practices of their peers by default.

Yet on this score, the research evidence is encouraging. Teachers who have a clear sense of purpose can resist the temptation of conformity, and they can implement practices consistent with their aims. Letitia Fickel, for example, has described a secondary teacher with strongly felt and consciously articulated goals that included preparing students to become active and critically thoughtful citizens and helping them learn from the "multiple truths and knowledge inherent in a diverse, democratic society." His instruction was consistent with these goals, as he engaged students in working with primary sources, manipulating and interpreting data, and considering persistent and locally relevant social issues. Similarly, in Ronald Evans' study of five secondary history teachers, he found that the two with the clearest sense of purpose also engaged in classroom practices that most closely matched their aims; those whose goals were less deeply held (or less clearly articulated) often taught in ways inconsistent with their expressed beliefs. Jesse Goodman and Susan Adler, in their study of elementary social studies teachers, also found that in classrooms in which teachers had a clear sense of the subject's purpose, the enacted curriculum more closely matched their aims; those with less commitment to the subject were more likely to teach in inconsistent or contradictory ways. Meanwhile, comparative case studies both by Bruce VanSledright and Jere Brophy and by Suzanne Wilson and Sam Wineburg portray history teachers whose practices vary significantly but whose differences arise less from their pedagogical content knowledge than from the distinct goals they have for their students.²¹

The impact of purpose on classroom practice is particularly clear in S. G. Grant's detailed portrait of two high school history teachers. These teachers worked in the same setting—teaching the same course, to the same level of students, at the same school—and both had extensive preparation in historical content and instructional methods. Both were committed to history's importance and considered it necessary for understanding the present. Seen in terms of "teacher knowledge," the two appeared virtually identical. Yet their classroom practices differed dramatically: Mr. Blair lectured from the front of the room, displayed outlines of textbook content on an overhead, and required students to copy notes silently; Mrs. Strait not only lectured but engaged students in simulations, role playing, and small-group discussions, and she exposed them to a variety of texts and other media. Neither was a "better" teacher than the other, for Blair's lectures were not boring record of dates and facts but masterful narratives with complex characters and interesting plots; he was as accomplished at delivering lectures as Strait was at facilitating small groups and class discussion. Grant's comparison of Blair and Strait is instructive, then, because it enables us to consider the factors that influence teachers' practices without being led astray by the confounding variable of "effectiveness": Both were effective at what they were doing, but that doing differed greatly.²²

Why were their practices so dissimilar? It was not because of differing content knowledge, for both had bachelors and masters degrees in history, and both described the subject in terms compatible with the views of contemporary historians, although they emphasized different aspects of the subject. Nor did their practices arise from differing knowledge of pedagogy, for Blair was as familiar as Strait with a variety of instructional methods—he simply chose not to use them. Rather, differences between the two derived from their differing purposes. Blair wanted students to learn the master narrative of U.S. history from the Colonial Era to the present day—a complex narrative, one that included both progress and problems. Combined with his belief that students had little or no background in the subject, Blair's goal rendered the use of overhead notes and lectures a seemingly obvious choice for classroom practice, for it allowed him to cover that narrative efficiently; as Grant notes, "Stories demand a storyteller and an audience, and there is no role confusion in Blair's classroom." Blair resembled other history teachers in attempting to cover material efficiently, but he differed from many of his colleagues in that he aimed to cover the material he considered important rather than that mandated by external authorities. (He refused to reduce his coverage of the Federal Period, for example, despite its de-emphasis in recent curriculum guidelines.) Like most teachers, Blair was motivated by practicality—hence his use of lecture—but his focus on coverage was motivated not by the desire to do what everyone else did but by his own goal of exposing students to the grand narrative of U.S. history. In this case, coverage was not a means to the end of fitting in but a clearly articulated end of its own.²³

Strait had a different purpose. She wanted students to understand history not only intellectually but emotionally, and in particular, to become familiar with the perspectives of a diverse set of actors who were involved in historical events, with the ultimate goal of becoming more tolerant of those who differed from themselves. This goal drove Strait's classroom practice in several ways. First, she engaged students in simulations and role plays, so they were forced to consider events from the perspectives of people at the time; such activities were more effective than lectures as a way of getting students to understand multiple points of view. Second, Strait emphasized social history in addition to the political narratives that dominated Blair's narrative; because politics has traditionally been the preserve of elite White males, social history had greater potential to help students understand the diverse set of perspectives that Strait valued. Finally, Strait emphasized historical topics and periods she considered particularly effective at conveying the inner experiences of a range of participants; she devoted more attention to the Civil Rights movement, for example, than other topics that commanded as much space in the official curriculum. Like Blair, she made her own decisions about how to implement that curriculum, but whereas his decisions were most apparent when he included periods he thought necessary to understand the overall narra-

tive of U.S. history (such as the Federal Period), Strait's were most obvious in her emphasis on topics that helped achieve her goal of developing students' understanding of diverse experiences. Strait worried that students might not be exposed to enough content for their required examinations, but like Blair, her purposes guided her instruction.²⁴

Based on the studies we have described in this chapter, teachers' goals appear to have more impact on practice than their pedagogical content knowledge. Unless they have a clear sense of purpose, teachers' primary actions continue to be coverage of the curriculum and control of students, no matter how much they know about history, teaching, or the intersection of the two. Deriving from the common, and understandable, goals of fitting in and working efficiently, such practices appear to be the "default" means of teaching, and they quickly override principles based on the content of university coursework—even when teachers ostensibly understand and accept those principles. However, many teachers, including Strait and even Blair, resist the temptation to conformity. Their practices do not necessarily emphasize coverage (at least of the required curriculum) or control of students. They have alternative purposes—strongly held and clearly articulated—and they make decisions consistent with these goals. If we hope to change the nature of history teaching, then, we may have a greater impact by focusing on teachers' purposes than on their pedagogical content knowledge.

CHANGING THE PRACTICE OF HISTORY TEACHING

Most educators interested in reforming history education, despite a variety of individual backgrounds and perspectives, share a concern with changing instructional practice: They want the act of history teaching to change so that students interpret historical evidence and consider multiple perspectives. Unfortunately, reformers have long been bedeviled by the fact that the act of history teaching, like that of most subjects, is highly resistant to change. In recent years, programs of teacher education and professional development have focused on teacher knowledge as the key to reform: If teachers know more—about content, pedagogy, and the intersection of the two—then surely their instruction will be better. Our review of the available evidence, however, suggests that this is not true. Neither teachers' knowledge of history—including its interpretative nature—nor their knowledge of how to represent content to learners has a decisive impact on classroom practice. Although such knowledge is probably necessary for engaging students in historical interpretation, it is by no means sufficient.

If we want to change teachers' practices, we must change the purposes that guide those practices. To engage students in activities that involve interpreting evidence, teachers must have a purpose that can only be accomplished by such activities. This kind of purpose must be more than a

slogan, and it must be more than lip service; it must be a goal to which teachers are deeply and genuinely committed, a goal that will inspire efforts to make actions consistent with beliefs. Only this kind of commitment will overcome the temptation to conform and, ultimately, to replicate existing practice.

The first task, then, is to identify an instructional purpose that requires students to take part in interpreting historical evidence and considering multiple perspectives. There are two obvious candidates for this honor. The first has dominated scholarship on history education over the past two decades: Students should learn about the past in ways consistent with the academic discipline of history. Because that discipline involves interpretation of evidence and consideration of multiple perspectives, instruction in school should do so as well. This does not necessarily mean that students will become "little historians," but it does mean they will learn how historians develop interpretations, and this necessarily involves taking part in such activities themselves. Research into student's work with primary sources and historical perspective, and corresponding recommendations for emphasizing these practices in school have generally been situated in this framework. If teachers accept the premise that school history should familiarize students with disciplinary history, and if research demonstrates that students are capable of understanding and taking part in disciplinary activities, then the implications for practice are clear: Students should work with evidence, develop interpretations, and consider multiple perspectives.

This is the educational equivalent of trying to write a great book about the flea. The goal of teaching in ways consistent with academic disciplines is an inadequate and unconvincing rationale for history or, we suspect, any other subject. Far from constituting the crowning achievements of civilization that some scholars like to claim, academic disciplines are simply institutionalized outgrowths of the professional specialization that took place during the late 19th century. Moreover, their methods and objects of study are profoundly shaped by the limited and particularistic viewpoints of those involved in creating and perpetuating them.²⁵ As a rationale for teaching, the focus on disciplinary history seems unlikely to inspire the intellectual and emotional commitment necessary to reform practice. It has not done so yet, and we see no reason to think it will in the future. When teachers must decide between practices that help them fit into their school communities and those that adhere to disciplinary standards, most will choose conformity.

However, the other candidate for the purpose of history education has far greater potential to inspire the conviction necessary to resist temptations to conformity: Students should learn history to contribute to a participatory, pluralistic democracy. This is the argument we have made throughout the book, and there is no need to repeat it in detail. What we want to emphasize here is not just that we believe history should be taught this way, but that this goal can provide teachers with the intellectual pur-

pose necessary to break out of the mold of coverage and control. If teachers are committed to the humanistic goals necessary for democracy, then they literally cannot focus on covering curriculum and controlling students because those practices will not enable them to reach their goals. Preparing students to make reasoned judgments cannot be accomplished by telling them what to think; preparing them to move beyond their own perspective cannot be accomplished by demanding reproduction of a consensual narrative of the national past; and preparing them to take part in collaborative discourse about the common good cannot be accomplished by tightly controlled, teacher-centered instruction. These goals can only be achieved when students take part in meaningful and relevant historical inquiries, examine a variety of evidence, consider multiple viewpoints, and develop conclusions that are defended and negotiated with others. If preparation for democracy is the goal, then teachers will need to engage in these practices, regardless of what anyone else tells them; and if they need to engage in these practices, they will also need the tools teacher educators can provide, such as methods for finding and using primary sources, developing inquiry projects, managing discussion, and so on—the knowledge and skills usually thought of as “pedagogical content knowledge.” Teachers will use this knowledge when it helps them achieve their goals.

We have no magic formula for developing such purposes among teachers. On one hand, preparation for citizenship forms the underlying rationale for all public schooling in the United States, and teachers are likely to accept that broad goal as well as their own responsibility for achieving it. Yet on the other hand, research indicates that beginning and experienced teachers alike often hold narrow or unelaborated notions of democracy and of citizenship education.²⁶ Thus, although it may be easy to convince teachers that history should serve the goals of democracy, it will be more difficult to help them see how that goal can be achieved by the humanistic purposes we have described throughout this book. If teachers believe history should promote citizenship but do not think in terms of the participatory and pluralist elements of democracy, then coverage and control are likely to continue as the principal actions of the history classroom.

For teachers to emphasize reasoned judgment, an expanded view of humanity, and collaborative discourse about the common good, they will have to believe—deeply and clearly—that these contribute to democracy. Of course, these beliefs cannot simply be transmitted; teachers have to reach such conclusions themselves. To create the conditions that make such conclusions possible, teacher education programs may have to become less concerned with covering technical issues related to the discipline's content and pedagogy and more with helping teachers evaluate the relevance of history education, consider alternative perspectives on the subject, and become initiated into a community that takes these questions seriously. This does not guarantee that teachers will accept the humanistic goals of history

education, and we are willing to accept that they may construct different—or even better—perspectives of their own. However, we believe that given the chance, they will develop a deep and enduring commitment to democracy, because democracy is a mighty theme.

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